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ABSTRACT

The role of a teacher is that of a person who must deal with the socio-emotional demands of a system; foremost in this is the teacher-student relationship. To gauge the differences between secondary and elementary school teachers in these relationships, a revised version of the Problem Analysis Questionnaire (1960) was used. Eighty-one teachers, 38 secondary and 143 elementary, completed the questionnaire which was centered on a problem with a student that had no satisfactory solution. The results showed the secondary school teachers scored higher on all levels than the elementary teachers. This implies that the secondary teachers were more aware of interpersonal teacher-pupil conflicts. The greater responsibility of a teacher in secondary schools, the greater interdependence in the secondary school system, where communication is an issue, probably contribute to this result. Also, the culture of secondary schools provides more grounds for adult-adult interaction than the culture of elementary schools which is family-like. The results indicate that teachers should respond to the organizational and human context within which they work. (JA)

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A COMPARISON OF HUMAN RELATIONS PROBLEM DIAGNOSTIC TENDENCIES OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY TEACHERS

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In general this study can be seen as an inquiry into that specific part of classroom social system dynamics that focuses on the role of the teacher as a person who must deal with the social-emotional demands of the system as well as its task demands. On the social-emotional level, one may conceive of the teacher having to deal on two interacting levels: the classroom as a group situation and the pattern of teacher-student interpersonal interactions that occur within the group. The research reported here is concerned with the latter. Specifically, it was designed to deal with the question, Do secondary and elementary school teachers differ significantly in the way they diagnose their human relations problems with their pupils? Two notions generated this question.

First, earlier research on the results of sensitivity training suggested that different occupational roles of the participants seemed to affect the manner in which they diagnosed the human relations problems they encountered on-the-job. The participants in one study (Blumberg and Golembiewski, 1969) were industrial managers. The results indicated that the training experience had, indeed, induced changes in diagnostic tendencies. In a second project (Blumberg, 1971) the participants were elementary and secondary school teachers. In this case, and contrary to the previous situation, the training appeared to have no affect on the way in which the participants diagnosed the human relations problems they encountered in their work. Specifically, the results

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indicated that the teachers, after training, viewed problems they had with students in a similar light to the way they saw these problems prior to the training. Further, and leading as in part to the present study, a post hoc analysis of the data revealed that differences appeared to exist in the way elementary and secondary teachers perceived their personal and interpersonal problems with students. However, the number of teachers involved in the study was inadequate to place confidence in any generalizations.

Second, we had observed that elementary and secondary classroom social systems varied. It appeared that the teacher-pupil relationships in the elementary school were basically adult-child oriented while in secondary schools they were more adult-adult oriented. If these observations were accurate, we speculated that the adult-child social system would encourage the elementary teachers to perceive the basis for their human relation problems with their pupils differently than the adult-adult social system of the secondary teacher.

The Problem Analysis Questionnaire

The Problem Analysis Questionnaire (Oshry and Harrison, 1960) was originally developed to focus on adult-adult relationships in an organizational setting. It was used in the managerial studies referred to above. In the present study, it was adapted to fit teacher-student relationships. The PAQ is a 64-item instrument composed of 9 scales. Each scale indicates the potency a teacher attributes to a possible cause of a teacher-student human relations problem. The scales are defined as follows:

1. Self: Rational-Technical. The items here deal, generally, with the extent to which a person sees himself as having brought his best resources to bear in thinking through and communicating about the problem. Example: I have not let the other know where I stand on this problem.

2. Self: Closed. This scale deals with the extent that the individual perceives the problem being unresolved because he has not been open enough or because he has been resistant to the ideas of others. Example: I have been relatively difficult to approach.

3. Organization: Rational-Technical. Here the concern is with the perceptions of the individual that explain the reference-problem in terms of organization structure or availability of resources. Example: The organization lets things go too far before taking action.

4. Organization: Closed. The items in this dimension deal with the perceptions of the individual concerning the relative openness and attitudes toward innovation that exist in the organization. Example: The organization has become inflexible.

5. Others: Rational-Technical. Though the items are not identical with Scale 1, Self: Rational-Technical, this dimension of the PAQ deals with similar notions. Scale 5 focuses on the respondent's perception of the other person(s) involved in the problem. Scale 1 emphasizes perceptions of self.

6. Others: Closed. In this dimension, the items resemble those in Self: Closed, but the complementary focus is on the respondent's perception of the other person. Example: Others are resentful of outside suggestions or help.

7. Self and Others: Rational-Technical. This dimension complements 1 and 5. Instead of focusing on the self or the other, however, Scale 7 elicits respondent's perceptions of the interpersonal situation that exists between self and the other person. Example: The other person and I have not tried hard enough to work this problem out.

8. Self and Others: Closed. This scale complements 2 and 6. Example: The other person and I really don't trust each other.

9. Situational. The last dimension deals with factors in the organization or in the people involved that are beyond the ability of the respondent to change. They are personal or organizational "givens." Example: Both the other persons' and my jobs are such that we must work toward opposing goals.

The Sample

The sample for the study was composed of 81 teachers, 38 secondary and 43 elementary, in five Central New York communities. Each teacher was requested to state in writing a human relations problem they have with a pupil. The problem should be one that the teacher is directly involved in, there is no satisfactory resolution, that is important to the teacher, and the teacher wants to change. With the problem explicitly delineated, the teacher then completed the PAQ. Responses to the PAQ items are made on a five point Likert type scale. Its poles were: 1) This factor was of no importance relative to the development of the problem and 2) This factor was of a great deal of importance relative to the development of the problem.

Differences of the means on each scale were analyzed by t tests.

Results

Reference to Table 1 indicates that the means between the elementary and secondary teachers were significantly different at the .05 level on 7 of the 9 scales. Only the Self-Closed and Situational scales were not significant.

Table 1 also shows that the mean PAQ score for secondary teachers was higher in every case than the elementary teachers mean score.

Table 1

Comparison of Mean Problem Analysis Questionnaire Scores for Elementary and Secondary School Teachers

	Elementary		Secondary		
Scale	n	Mean	n	Mean	t
Self: Rational-Technical	38	2.576	43	1.729	4.365*
Self: Closed	38	1.990	43	1.654	1.796
Organization: Rational-Technical	38	2.916	43	1.778	4.626*
Organizational: Closed	38	2.401	43	1.401	4.629*
Other: Rational-Technical	38	3.747	43	3.009	3.369*
Other: Closed	38	3.526	43	2.869	3.252*
Self-Other Rational-Technical	38	2.796	43	1.926	4.306*
Self-Other: Closed	38	2.559	43	1.814	3.564*
Situation	38	2.302	43	1.930	1.888

* $p < .05$

Discussion

The secondary teachers mean scores were all higher than were those of the elementary teachers. This data seems to suggest that secondary teachers are more aware of and/or think more about their interpersonal teacher-pupil conflicts than do elementary teachers. It may also imply that secondary school teachers are more conscious of the potential interpersonal or personal derivation of their problems with students than are their colleagues in the elementary schools.

The differences between the human systems that develop in secondary and elementary schools seem partially to account for the secondary teachers awareness of their teacher-pupil human relations problems. The secondary human system is more interdependent. Secondary teachers are responsible for the development and control of more pupils in the classroom, in the corridors, in lunch areas, and around the building in general. These broad responsibilities raise the demand for cooperation and coordination among pupils, teachers, and administrators. The increased need for cooperation and coordination makes individuals dependent on each other or, at least, creates a larger number of interactive settings to which the secondary teacher must respond. This circumstance may influence teachers to become more aware of interpersonal conflict and its genesis.

The elementary situation is quite different. The social system is of a different nature. School life is not as interrelated. Traditionally, each teacher is responsible just for his classroom so that the school is more accurately described as a collection of sub-human systems. Each human system is virtually isolated. Therefore, the need for cooperation and coordination is limited. Interpersonal conflict may not be as frequent or acute, thus placing fewer diagnostic demands on the elementary teacher.

Another partial explanation for the difference between means is the manner teachers perceive the appropriate teacher-pupil interaction style. Because secondary teachers are more likely to view and treat their pupils as adults, adult-adult interactions increase and adult-child interactions decrease. The secondary students may be considered more as equals, at least on an interactive level, than elementary students. Potentially, this quasi equality encourages student-teacher conflict as their values and attitudes become more explicit and clash. Because of these clashes, teachers may become more aware of their interpersonal conflict with pupils. Secondary teachers cannot assume that their opinions or methods are correct and rely on an adult-child style as elementary teachers can.

An extension of this thought is that the culture of secondary schools (business-like) tends to provide a ground for adult-adult interaction more than the culture of the elementary school which is family-like, thus encouraging adult-child interaction. Secondary students may be seen as potentially adult problem-solvers while elementary students are perceived as children to be taught.

An analysis of the substance of scores permits some interesting inferences. In the case of elementary and secondary teachers, for example, it will be noted that the scales Other: Rational-Technical and Other: Closed receive the most emphasis. This is particularly interesting in the elementary situation in view of the relatively low scores on all other scales. The interpretation of this high emphasis is that both sets of teachers are saying, in effect, "If the students would think more clearly or listen to me, we would be able to deal with the problem." The responsibility for the development and non-resolution of the problem, then, is put on the student. This notion is further supported by the scores on the Self scales. They are quite low and

seem to suggest that on both a rational-technical and communications level teachers see themselves as not having much responsibility for the development or resolution of the problem. They don't perceive themselves as being focal in the conflict. It is more the student's fault than theirs.

With regard to the Organization scales, the case appears to be that secondary teachers see the school organization, both rational-technically and communications-wise, more of a contributing factor to the problems they have with students than do elementary teachers. This is understandable. Secondary schools are larger and more structurally complex than are elementary schools. More constraints tend to exist, both rule-wise and relative to communicative-openness in the secondary situation than in the elementary. Secondary teachers, then, seem to be suggesting that their freedom of action in dealing with student problems is more limited by the school organization than is the case with elementary teachers.

The intensity of the scores for both teacher groups on the Self-Other scales seems to indicate that they don't see the quality of interpersonal relations existant between them and students having a great bearing on the human relations problems with which they must deal. The orientation seems to be personalized: "It's his fault, not mine." The nature and dynamics of what takes place between the two appears to be somewhat sloughed off as not critical to interpersonal problems, a curious circumstance in itself.

Conclusion

This study, though a modest one, reveals some interesting insights concerning the manner in which teachers perceive the problems they have with youngsters and, by extension, the strategies they might invoke to deal with those problems. The primary set seems to be that problems develop between teacher and student because of the student as a person. "If they would only behave" or "If their parents would control them better" appears to be the teacher attitude. This approach is somewhat more pronounced in the elementary school than in the secondary setting. This interpretation is not intended as criticism of teachers. Rather, a more productive view is to suggest that teachers respond to the organizational and human context within which they work in a manner, perhaps, of which they may not be aware. The situation is not unlike that associated with institutional racism where discriminatory behavior patterns have been adopted in a more or less unwitting fashion.

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